

An Litir Bheag

le Ruairidh MacIlleathain

An Litir Bheag is a shortened and simplified version of Ruairidh's Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh (also available on the BBC website), designed for those who are at an earlier stage of learning Gaelic. The topic each week is the same as Litir do Luchd-ionnsachaidh so that, once the Litir Bheag is mastered, a student of the language might wish to try the full Litir. This is Litir Bheag 735 (which corresponds to Litir 1,039). Ruairidh can be contacted at roddy.maclean@bbc.co.uk.

<p><i>I was relating the story of James MacPherson, the famous freebooter. The day of his hanging came in Banff.</i></p> <p><i>A messenger was on the way to Banff on horseback. He had a reprieve from a higher court in Aberdeen.</i></p> <p><i>The sheriff ordered the clock in the middle of Banff to be put forward a quarter of an hour. Thus, the time of the hanging arrived before the messenger reached the middle of the town. Many people were horrified about it.</i></p> <p><i>While he was in prison, James created a song. He sang it, playing the fiddle at the same time, before going on the gibbet. Here is one version of it.</i></p> <p><i>Fareweel ye dungeons dark and strang, fareweel, fareweel tae ye, MacPherson's time will nae be lang on yonder gallows tree</i></p> <p><i>Sae rantinly, sae wantonly, sae dauntinly gaed he</i> <i>He played a tune and he danced it aroon below the gallows tree</i></p> <p><i>It was by a woman's treacherous hand</i> <i>I was condemned tae dee</i></p>	<p><i>Bha mi ag innse eachdraidh Sheumais Mhic a' Phearsain, an ceatharnach ainmeil. Thàinig latha a chrochaidh ann am Banbh.</i></p> <p><i>Bha teachdaire air an rathad a Bhanbh air muin-eich. Bha stad-breith aige bho chùirt nas àirde ann an Obar Dheathain.</i></p> <p><i>Dh'òrdaich an siorram an cloc ann am meadhan Bhanbh a chur air adhart cairteal na h-uarach. Mar sin, thàinig uair a' chrochaidh mus do ràinig an teachdaire meadhan a' bhaile. Bha mòran daoine air an tàmailteachadh mu dheidhinn.</i></p> <p><i>Fhad 's a bha e sa phrìosan, chruthaich Seumas òran. Ghabh e e, agus e a' seinn na fìdhle aig an aon àm mus deach e air a' chroich. Seo aon dreach dheth:</i></p> <p><i>Fareweel ye dungeons dark and strang, fareweel, fareweel tae ye, MacPherson's time will nae be lang on yonder gallows tree</i></p> <p><i>Sae rantinly, sae wantonly, sae dauntinly gaed he</i> <i>He played a tune and he danced it aroon below the gallows tree</i></p> <p><i>It was by a woman's treacherous hand I was condemned tae dee</i></p>
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Aboon a ledge at a window she sat, a blanket she threw ow'r me

*There's some come here tae see me hang, and some tae buy my fiddle
But before that I wid part wi' her I'd brak her through the middle*

*He took the fiddle intae baith o his hands and he brak it ower a stane
Sayin, nay ither hand shall play on thee when I am dead and gane*

*The reprieve was comin' ow'r the Brig o Banff tae set MacPherson free,
But they pit the clock a quarter afore, and they hanged him frae the tree.*

In the song, James broke the fiddle on a stone. But some people reported that he asked if anyone would take it – on condition that they play the same tune on it at his wake. Nobody was willing to take the fiddle because many of James's enemies were present. So James broke the fiddle over his knee. He shouted that nobody else would play it. And he went on the gibbet.

One of James's relatives took the broken fiddle back to Badenoch. It's now in the Clan MacPherson Museum in Newtonmore.

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Anns an òran, bhris Seumas fhidheall air clach. Ach dh'aithris cuid gun do dh'fhaighnich e an gabhadh duine i – air a' chùmhnant 's gum biodh iad a' cluich an aon phuirt oirre aig taigh-aire dha. Cha robh duine deònach an fhidheall a ghabhail oir bha tòrr nàimhdean aig Seumas an làthair. Mar sin, bhris Seumas an fhidheall thairis air a ghlùn. Dh'èigh e nach cluicheadh duine eile i. Agus chaidh e air a' chroich.

Thug fear de chàirdean Sheumais an fhidheall bhriste air ais a Bhàideanach. Tha i a-nise ann an Taigh-tasgaidh Clann Mhic a' Phearsain ann am Baile Ùr an t-Slèibh.